

Equity

Equity Goals - Increasing equity means looking for the barriers in someone's way and doing what you can to reduce those barriers so everyone has the same opportunity to participate easily. The new draft maps prepared by the working group satisfy the equity criteria:

- Using data to draw precinct lines
- Having all town meeting members elected next April
 - More open process may encourage new candidates
 - Expense of running should not burden only some candidates

Election Goals - Reprecincting allows communities to consider changes that address local issues in addition to following the requirements to adjust boundaries based on population and census data which is how we got 21 precincts 50 years ago. The Town Clerk recommends reducing the number of precincts to improve election management.

- Reduce the overhead of holding elections
- Simplify polling locations by not tripling up in some of them

Equity Maps - The Reprecincting Working Group recommends using equity considerations to draw an entirely new map that uses data to group neighborhoods that are coherent and don't isolate pockets of dissimilar households based on race, income, and housing.

- The 16 precinct map achieves the goal better
- The 21 precinct map is still a significant improvement over the current map

Our "equity maps" allow:

- Minority voices on a range of issues to be represented at Town Meeting
- Better access to polling locations by drawing many precincts around the Mass Ave corridor, especially if we reconsider the polling locations and place more near Mass Ave.
- Townwide election of Town Meeting which is an open process putting all candidates on the most equal footing

"Communities of Interest" is a phrase used in the Secretary of State's reprecincting materials. Cities and towns have the opportunity in this process to consider local issues beyond race and population. A resident provided an interesting example by suggesting that we consider elevation because the people at the top of a hill have very little idea what happens to stormwater when it reaches the homes at the bottom of the hill and this could directly impact perspectives and votes at Town Meeting.

Fifty years ago the Select Board decided it was in the community's best interest to create 21 small precincts instead of redrawing the boundaries of 14 precincts and rebalancing population. The reprecincting process exists to provide these opportunities.

Town Meeting

240 Members - The loss of 12 voting members should not be considered a harm to Town Meeting as an institution.

- 240 members is the target number in state law
- The full membership is rarely convened
- Quorum for conducting business at Town Meeting is 64 members

Average attendance and voting over the past few years. Attendance and voting were improved in 2020 and 2021, likely due to virtual Town Meeting.

	<u>2021</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2015</u>
Members	252	252	252	250	252	252	249
Present	246	246	225	212	221	215	216
Voting	231	240	204	204	206	197	199

Representation - An increase in the number of representatives elected by each precinct can be considered an increase in representation, per voter. 15 TMMs representing the interests of their neighbors improves representation of local interests in Town Meeting.

Geography of Precincts - The geography of our current map has some fairly sprawling, low-density neighborhoods that probably aren't walkable now (see precinct 11, 12, 19, probably 13, 10, 16 and 20 even for example). Certain areas of town, such as the flatter, denser East Arlington neighborhoods, will always be more walkable.

Residents Per Precinct - With fewer precincts, each precinct will contain more residents and Town Meeting Members will have more constituents than they do under our current system. However, we have--and would continue to have under 16 precincts--unusually small precincts compared to other communities and compared to the legal size under the law.

Reviewing the numbers of residents per precinct:

- Maximum under the law is 4000 residents
- Comparable communities average 3200 residents
- Currently Arlington has 2200 residents
- Sixteen precincts would increase that 2900 residents

Arlington has fifty years of experience with our current system. Any change must balance the needs of residents now with the discomfort of the current town meeting members. The reprecincting process exists so communities can reevaluate periodically. Do the current boundaries allow diverse voices to be represented at Town Meeting the way we would like?

Clarifications

- We are not recommending a change in the number of polling locations. Each precinct does not have one polling location, so reducing precincts does not directly reduce the places where people go to vote or directly impact how far they have to travel to vote.
- Changes to election laws are being debated right now. These changes could allow us to offer in person early voting for town elections and codify procedures for voting by mail, all of which is simpler with fewer precincts to manage.
- Some people are aware of their precinct as an identity. Some people are aware of their school district and for them it may define a neighborhood identity. The Jason Heights precincts do not vote at their school because their school is on the other side of town. There are very few certainties in this process.
- By law, we must have precincts with no more than 4000 residents so we need a minimum of 12 precincts. Some commenters hoped we could simplify things by adopting the seven elementary districts as precinct boundaries.
- The law requires us to put the lines where census blocks are, and census blocks nearly always run down the middle of a street. We can't choose to put them through backyards or to use only major streets as dividing lines because we have to manage the population totals.